

Steel Casements for a Tudor Cottage

Seventy-five-year-old steel casement windows give a whole new meaning to the idea of replacement windows.

by Martha McDonald

What do you do with a charming, almost 75-year-old Tudor house that's equipped with aluminum replacement windows that no longer work? That's what Peter and Claire Filippelli asked themselves when they purchased their 1,728-sq.-ft. home in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, in 2002.

The answer was to replace the replacement windows with 75-year-old steel casement windows similar to the ones that were original to the 1929 house. Finding the windows was not so easy — there are very few companies that manufacture them. "I never even considered standard replacement windows," says Mrs. Filippelli. "We knew we wanted steel casement windows like those that were originally in the house. The difficulty was finding them. I called around looking for steel casement windows, but everyone wanted to provide us with new replacement windows." Luckily, Seekircher Steel Window Repair Corp. of Scarsdale, NY, keeps an inventory. "I have been collecting these windows ever since we went into business 26 years ago," says John Seekircher, who, with his brother Robert, runs the family business, which also includes a nephew Paul. "You have to recycle these windows, because it's hard to find companies making them today."

John Seekircher was able to look at two of the original steel casement windows that had been kept on the front of the house, allowing him to discover the name of the manufacturer, Fenestra. Although the firm is no longer in business, he found windows from the same supplier for the Filippelli house. "I identified what had been there and used windows from the same manufacturer, so basically the house is back to what it was originally," he says. "The aluminum replacement windows had probably been put in 15 or 20 years ago. These windows had failed; the balances were broken so they didn't stay up and the insulated glass was fogged so you couldn't see through them. That's what the mindset was then — rip everything out and put in replacements. That's why they call them replacement windows. Once you replace them, you have to keep replacing them."

New 75-Year Old Windows

Seekircher replaced 10 white aluminum double-hung windows of various sizes in the Filippelli home with



This small Tudor house in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, regained its charm when the owners replaced the no-longer-functioning aluminum replacement windows with 75-year-old steel casement windows that were supplied and refurbished by Seekircher Window Repair Corp.

Painted black steel casement windows that were already at least 75 years old. "We have a small house on a beautiful piece of property," says Mrs. Filippelli. "It looks like a little cottage, but those other windows were horrible, both in the way they looked and worked." It took about two weeks of work in the shop to clean, prime and reglaze the windows and to clean and polish the solid-brass hardware before they could be installed. In some cases, the windows didn't even need to be reglazed; the existing glass could just be cleaned. The actual installation took only two days.

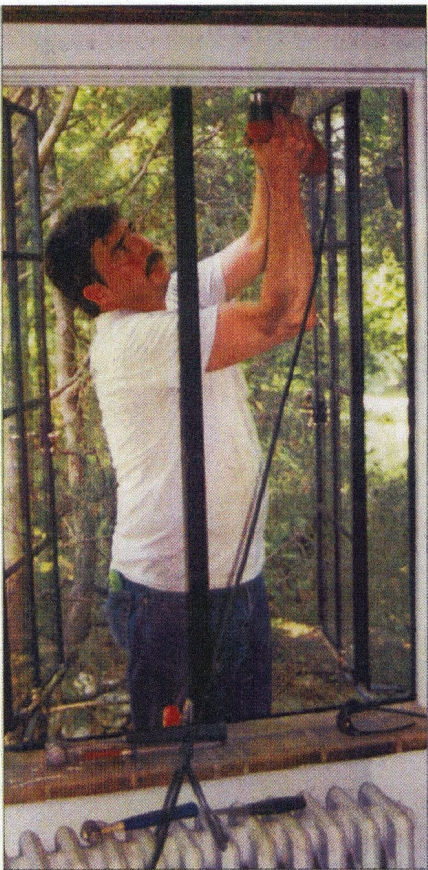
"The new old windows changed the whole look of the house," says Mrs. Filippelli. Once she located the Seekirchers, a few weeks later the house had its old character back. "You can't get the quality of older products in new windows," she adds. "Look how long these windows have already lasted. I don't plan to ever put another window in this house."

John Seekircher emphatically agrees with her assessment of the difference between the quality of windows now and then. While this particular job involved replacing aluminum windows with vintage steel casement windows, most of his business is repairing existing steel casement windows that owners want to keep in their homes and buildings.

Left: After the refurbished steel casement windows were installed, the entrance to the kitchen was back to its original appearance.

Below: These two kitchen windows are typical of the aluminum replacement models that had been installed in the Filippelli house about 15-20 years ago. The Seekirchers replaced them with 75-year-old 37x39-in. painted black steel casement windows that they had restored.





Robert Seekircher installs one of the larger (55 in. wide x 51 in. tall) vintage steel windows in the dining room. After refurbishing the windows in the shop, the firm installed them in two days. The new window (right) in the dining room provides a picturesque view of the woody yard.

Even though the window in the study was exceptionally large (37 in. wide x 73 in. tall), the Seekirchers were able to find a vintage model (right) with a transom at the top that fit the space. On the left is the worn-out aluminum window.

Built to Last

"We repair more than 6,000 windows a year all over the country," Seekircher says. "You never need to replace them; the steel windows that are already there are extraordinary. In addition, the cost of repairing steel casement windows is a fraction of the replacement cost." He cites one job in which the repair of the steel casement windows in the house cost the owner \$7,000, while replacement windows of a similar style would have cost approximately \$200,000. "Plus," he says, "repairing the windows

versus replacing them has so much less impact on the building."

One of the firm's high-profile jobs was repairing the windows in Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater in Mill Run, PA, working with WASA Architects of New York City. "We did the same job there that we do in any house," says Seekircher. "The only difference is that it was like working in a fishbowl because of all of the tours. It was a great honor working on that house.

"People are starting to respect old buildings," Seekircher says. "They are happy to find information

on how to restore and save them. They want the look and feel of the old houses." Educating people to the advantages of the older windows is still a big part of his job. "Lots of people still want the new replacement windows, because they think they are more airtight," he says. "I explain to them that only 12 to 15% of the heat loss in a house is through the windows. Plus, these windows let the house breathe the way it's supposed to. These windows have stood the test of time. They have been neglected for 60, 70, 80 years and they're still working." ♦